

**Statement of Colonel Randall J. Larsen, USAF (Ret)**  
**Founding Director Bipartisan WMD Terrorism Research Center**  
**House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security**  
**Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence**  
**November 15, 2012**

Mr. Chairman ... I would like to thank you for convening this hearing, and to express my appreciation to the Aspen Institute, in particular, Mr. Clark Kent Ervin, for leading the research and analysis for the report submitted to the Subcommittee.

As one of the founding directors of the Bipartisan WMD Terrorism Research Center, my opening statement and responses to your questions will reflect my own opinions and not necessarily those of the entire research team convened by the Aspen Institute.

Mr. Chairman ... in a recent press conference, Governor Chris Christie described the destruction of the New Jersey shore as “unthinkable.” I like the governor, but I will nevertheless point out his error. He could have stated the destruction was catastrophic or calamitous, but it was most certainly not “unthinkable.”

Since 2005, the Department of Homeland Security has provided Federal, state and local government officials with descriptions of 15 disaster scenarios. The hurricane scenario describes a Category IV hitting a major metropolitan area, killing 1,000 and hospitalizing 5,000. It portends major portions of the metropolitan area would be flooded, with structural collapse in many buildings and homes, and significant infrastructure damage.

Thankfully, Sandy was only a Category I storm, and evacuations significantly limited the number of deaths and serious injuries. In other words, the effects of Sandy were far from “unthinkable.” They were far less severe than our National Planning Scenario described.

My concern, Mr. Chairman, is that we have once again fallen into a mindset best described by the 9/11 Commission as “a failure of imagination.” Most of our homeland security, public health and disaster response personnel at the federal, state and local levels understand what is “thinkable”, including the members of this committee. I cannot, however, say the same for many other appointed and elected officials. I base this assessment on the actions--or should I say, lack of action--of these officials.

In December 2008 the WMD Commission concluded that an act of bioterrorism was more likely than an act of nuclear terrorism. Additionally, the national planning scenarios list only one weather-related disaster, but four biological disaster scenarios. Nevertheless, our preparedness to respond to a major biological event is far less today than for a major hurricane.

In October 2011, former Senators Bob Graham and Jim Talent released the WMD Center's report card on the nation's bio-response preparedness.

Mr. Chairman, the WMD Center assembled an extraordinary team of more than two-dozen advisors to guide this assessment. It included a former deputy commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, the director of disaster medicine at the American Medical Association, and a former special assistant for biodefense to both Presidents Clinton and Bush. We identified a wide spectrum of possible attacks—ranging from small-scale, such as the anthrax letters of 2001, to a global event of near Biblical proportions.

In its recommendations, the WMD Center's report suggested the Congress and Administration should focus on improving response capabilities to the type of attack described in both the 2008 WMD Commission report and the National Planning Scenarios: aerosolized anthrax.

The grades were merely a snapshot of a point in time, but the most valuable aspect of the report card is the fundamental expectations developed by our team of experts that served as metrics for the assessment. Additionally, the report provided a series of questions to assess capabilities in achieving these expectations.

This committee and other Congressional committees should be using these metrics and questions in 2013 to determine if we are making progress in strengthening bio-preparedness and response capabilities.

With respect to the Aspen Institute WMD Working Group paper submitted to your committee, the WMD Center fully supports all nine recommendations, and in particular, reauthorization of the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act.

Mr. Chairman I will close by thanking the other members of the Aspen Institute's WMD Working Group, and in particular Dr. Lenny Cole. It was a pleasure working with the group and a great learning experience.